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FIGHTING A VICIOUS FILM

PROTEST AGAINST
"THE BIRTH OF A NATION"

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National

Published by the Boston Branch
of the
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
"

1915

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FIGHTING
A VICIOUS FILM.

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THE
A VICIOUS FILM

The bequest of
Daniel Murray,
Washington, D. C.
1925.

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A VICIOUS PLAY WITH VICIOUS METHODS.

In its advertisement we are told that "The Birth of a Nation" is founded on Thomas Dixon's novel "The Clansman"; that it is a war play "that worked the audience up into a frenzy"; that "it will make you hate."

In an interview with a Boston Editor, Thomas Dixon said, "that one purpose of his play was to create a feeling of abhorrence in white people, especially white women, against colored men"; "that he wished to have all Negroes removed from the United States and that he hopes to help in the accomplishment of that purpose by "The Birth of a Nation."

In furthering these purposes the producers of the film do not hesitate to resort to the meanest vilification of the Negro race, to pervert history and to use the most subtle form of untruth—a half truth.

Well knowing that such a play would meet strong opposition in Boston, large sums of money were spent in the employment of Pinkerton detectives and policemen to intimidate citizens, and the managers of the theatre refused to sell tickets to colored people. To soften opposition, the impression was given that the President of the United States had endorsed the play and that George Foster Peabody and other distinguished people favored it. One method of working up support was to pass cards among the auditors asking them to endorse the play. These cards were circulated, signed and collected at the end of the first act and before the second act in which appear the foul and loathsome misrepresentations of colored people and the glorification of the hideous and murderous band of the Ku Klux Klan.

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The indignation against the play grew in intensity. The colored people of greater Boston rose in mass against it. It was opposed by many distinguished citizens including Governor Walsh, Lieutenant-Governor Cushing, Mr. Moorfield Storey, Hon. Albert E. Pillsbury, Hon. Samuel W. McCall, Rev. Samuel M. Crothers, D.D., Dr. Alexander Mann of Trinity Church, a majority of both branches of the legislature and many religious and civic organizations. A series of public meetings, remarkable for the spirit of unity and brotherhood and a very pronounced desire to save every group of our varied citizenship from insult and indignity, resulted in securing a new Censor Law for the City of Boston as follows:—

SECTION 1. The Mayor of Boston, except as provided in section forty-six of Chapter one hundred and six of the Revised Laws, shall grant a license for theatrical exhibitions, public shows, public amusements and exhibitions of every description, to which admission is obtained upon payment of money or upon delivery of any valuable thing, or by a ticket or voucher obtained for money or any valuable thing, upon such terms and conditions as he deems reasonable, but there shall not be charged a fee exceeding one hundred dollars for such license when the entertainment, exhibition or show is given in a building licensed as a theatre. A license to be exercised in a building licensed as a theatre shall be for a theatrical season and shall expire on the first day of August of each year. The Mayor and Police Commissioner of Boston and the Chief Justice of the Municipal Court of the City of Boston, by a majority vote, may revoke or suspend any such license at their pleasure.

SECTION 2. Section two of chapter four hundred and ninety-four of the Acts of the year nineteen hundred and eight is hereby repealed.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon its passage. (Approved May 21, 1915.)

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Disregarding this law, plainly intended to stop the play, two of the censors refused to revoke its license and the Executive Committee of the Boston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which led the fight against the play, as a protest against the action of the censors, adopted these resolutions:—

Resolved: That we record our profound regret that the newly created Board of Censors for the City of Boston in disregard of the plain intent of the legislature have refused to revoke the license of the photo-play, "The Birth of a Nation."

We deplore this decision as a rejection of the just claims of our colored fellow citizens to be protected against a malicious misrepresentation of their race in a play involving a perversion of our national history and a glorification of lynching.

We deplore the insidious influence of this play in the manner of its presentation—before audiences whose judgment is misled and whose passions are inflamed by a most clever combination of spectacular and musical art, with the inevitable result of increased racial and sectional antagonism, at a time when the whole world is longing for peace.

We deplore the sinister circumstances connected with the controversy over this play in Boston—the enormous capital invested in its preparation; the lavish use of advertising space in newspapers whose editorial columns with very few exceptions have been silent; the extraordinary police protection employed to prevent anticipated outbreaks at the performances; all these things revealing the formidable commercial interests involved—while the opposition to the play, with no unworthy motive, has sought only to further justice, truth and peace.

While deploring the decision of the Board of Censors, we congratulate ourselves on the great increase of interest in the cause of human rights, as advocated by our Association, which has been aroused by the recent discussions and we earnestly appeal to all fairminded people, here and throughout the country, to use every effort to counteract the malign influence of this play, through its legal suppression, through a

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better acquaintance with the truth of our national history, and through more friendly and helpful relations between the colored and white citizens of our land. And we would especially emphasize the fact that this is not a matter involving the welfare of the colored race alone, but one in which all races composing our cosmopolitan citizenship have a vital interest.

EXTENT OF THE PROTEST

The failure of the Censors to stop "The Birth of a Nation" would have been a very grievous disappointment if the agitation against it had not brought good of a very deep and satisfactory kind. To learn that on a question of decency and self respect they could get together and in a dignified, law abiding manner resent, as one man, the insult offered to their race by this play was a wonderfully heartening result to the twenty thousand colored people of greater Boston. Add to this the fact that the moral enthusiasm, love for liberty and a genuine feeling of brotherhood which swept over the country in Abolition days seemed to be reawakened; that where for years stood a thin, heroic line of the old guard, growing fewer and more pathetic in their demand that the faith of the fathers be kept, that the Constitution be the paladium of the liberty of all the people and not of a chosen few, there now stand thousands, recruited from the ranks of the various race groups composing our citizenship, demanding fair play and justice for all men, and the compensation far outweighs the failure to stop this one infamous play. With a view to giving some idea of the scope of the agitation and the spirit in which it was conducted a few of the many letters, resolutions and speeches produced by the opposition to the play in April are put in permanent form with the further purpose of aiding other communities in opposing this and all such productions.

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ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

(FRANCIS HACKETT in *The New Republic*)

If history bore no relation to life, this motion picture drama could well be reviewed and applauded as a spectacle. As a spectacle it is stupendous. It lasts three hours, represents a staggering investment of time and money, reproduces entire battle scenes and complex historic events, amazes even when it wearies by its attempt to encompass the Civil War. But since history does bear on social behavior, "The Birth of a Nation" cannot be reviewed simply as a spectacle. It is more than a spectacle. It is an interpretation, the Rev. Thomas Dixon's interpretation, of the relations of the North and South and their bearing on the Negro.

Were the Rev. Thomas Dixon a representative white Southerner, no one could criticize him for giving his own version of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed. If he possessed the typical Southern attitude, the paternalistic, it would be futile to read a lecture on it. Seen from afar, such an attitude might be deemed reactionary, but at any rate it is usually genial and humane and protective, and because it has experience back of it, it has to be met with some respect. But the attitude which Mr Dixon possesses and the one for which he forges corroboration in history is a perversion due largely to his personal temperament. So far as I can judge from this film, as well as from my recollection of Mr. Dixon's books, his is the sort of disposition that foment a great deal of the trouble in civilization. Sometimes in the clinical laboratory the doctors are reputed to perform an operation on a dog so that he loses the power to restrain certain motor activities. If he is started running in a cage, the legend goes, he keeps on running incessantly, and nothing can stop him but to hit him on the head with a club. There is a quality about everything Mr. Dixon has done that reminds me of this abnormal dog. At a remote period of his existence it is possible that he possessed a rudimentary faculty of self-analysis. But before that faculty

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developed he crystalized in his prejudices, and forever it was stunted. Since that time, whenever he has been stimulated by any of the ordinary emotions, by religion or by patriotism or by sex, he has responded with a frantic intensity. Energetic by nature, the forces that impel him are doubly violent because of this lack of inhibition. Aware as a clergyman that such violence is excessive, he has learned in all his melodramas to give them a highly moral twang. If one of his heroes is about to do something peculiarly loathsome, Mr. Dixon thrusts a crucifix in his hand and has him roll his eyes to heaven. In this way the very basest impulses are given the sanction of godliness, and Mr. Dixon preserves his own respect and the respect of such people as go by the label and not by the rot-gut they consume.

In "The Birth of a Nation" Mr. Dixon protests sanctimoniously that his drama "is not meant to reflect in any way on any race or people of to-day." And then he proceeds to give to the Negro a kind of malignity that is really a revelation of his own malignity.

Passing over the initial gibe at the Negro's smell, we early come to a negrophile senator whose mistress is a mulatto. As conceived by Mr. Dixon and as acted in the film, this mulatto is not only a minister to the senator's lust but a woman of inordinate passion, pride and savagery. Gloating as she does over the promise of "Negro equality," she is soon partnered by a male mulatto of similar brute characteristics. Having established this triple alliance between the "uncrowned king" his diabolic colored mistress and his diabolic colored ally, Mr. Dixon shows the revolting processes by which the white South is crushed "under the heel of the black South." "Sowing the wind," he calls it. On the one hand we have "the poor bruised heart" of the white South, on the other "the new citizens inflamed by the growing sense of power." We see Negroes shoving white men off the sidewalk, Negroes quitting work to dance, Negroes beating a crippled old white patriarch, Negroes slinging up "faithful colored servants" and flogging them till they drop, Negro courtesans guzzling champagne with the

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would-be-head of the Black Empire, Negroes "drunk with wine and power," Negroes mocking their white master in chains, Negroes "crazy with joy" and terrorizing all the whites in South Carolina. We see the blacks flaunting placards demanding "equal marriage." We see the black leader demanding a "forced marriage" with an imprisoned and gagged white girl. And we see continually in the background the white Southerner in "agony of soul over the degradation and ruin of his people."

Encouraged by the black leader, we see Gus the renegade hover about another young white girl's home. To hoochy-coochy music we see the long pursuit of the innocent white girl by this lust-maddened negro, and we see her fling herself to death from a precipice, carrying her honor through "the opal gates of death."

Having painted this insanely apprehensive picture of an unbridled, bestial, horrible race, relieved only by a few touches of low comedy, "the grim reaping begins." We see the operations of the Ku Klux Klan, "the organization that saved the South from the anarchy of black rule." We see Federals and Confederates uniting in a Holy War "in defence of their Aryan birthright," whatever that is. We see the Negroes driven back, beaten, killed. The drama winds up with a suggestion of "Lincoln's solution"—back to Liberia—and then, if you please, with a film representing Jesus Christ in "the halls of brotherly love."

My objection to this drama is based partly on the tendency of the pictures but mainly on the animus of the printed lines I have quoted. The effect of these lines, reinforced by adroit quotations from Woodrow Wilson and repeated assurances of impartiality and goodwill, is to arouse in the audience a strong sense of the evil possibilities of the Negro and the extreme propriety and godliness of the Ku Klux Klan. So strong is this impression that the audience invariably applauds the refusal of the white hero to shake hands with a Negro, and under the circumstances it cannot be blamed. Mr. Dixon has identified the Negro with cruelty, superstition, insolence and lust.

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We know what a yellow journalist is. He is not yellow because he reports crimes of violence. He is yellow because he distorts them. In the region of history the Rev. Thomas Dixon corresponds to the yellow journalist. He is a clergyman, but he is a yellow clergyman. He is yellow because he recklessly distorts Negro crimes, gives them a disproportionate place in life, and colors them dishonestly to inflame the ignorant and the credulous. And he is especially yellow, and quite disgustingly and contemptibly yellow, because his perversions are cunningly calculated to flatter the white man and provoke hatred and contempt for the Negro.

Whatever happened during Reconstruction, this film is aggressively vicious and defamatory. It is spiritual assassination. It degrades the censors that passed it and the white race that endures it.

ITS PURPOSE

I, Rolfe Cobleigh, of Newton, in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, being duly sworn depose and say, that:

I am associate editor of The Congregationalist and Christian World, published at 14 Beacon St., Boston, where our offices are located.

My attention was attracted to the moving picture play entitled, "The Birth of a Nation," by editorials which appeared in the New York World, the New York Evening Post, the New York Globe and other newspapers condemning the production when it was first shown in New York. Several of my friends, who saw the show in New York, soon reported to me their disapproval on the grounds that it incited race prejudice against the Negro race, that it glorified lynching and falsified history. Influenced by this evidence I wrote a letter to Mr. D. W. Griffith, who was advertised as the producer of the film, and protested against the exhibition of such a series of moving pictures as these were represented to be. I received in reply a letter from Mr. Thomas Dixon, whose interest in "The Birth

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of a Nation" was indicated by the paper upon which he wrote, the letter-head being printed with the words: "Thomas Dixon's Theatrical Enterprises," under which was "The Birth of a Nation, with D. W. Griffith," following the titles of five other plays written by Mr. Dixon. He said in the letter referring to "our picture:" "The only objection to it so far is a Negro Society which advises its members to arm themselves to fight the whites." He also wrote that Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D., was "making a report on this work," and that if I would "await Dr. Parkhurst's report" he would send it to me. This letter was dated March 27.

Under date of April 3, I wrote in reply: "I shall await Dr. Parkhurst's report, which you say you will send me, with interest." I asked for the name of "a Negro society which advises its members to arm themselves to fight the whites."

Mr. Dixon wrote again under date of April 5, enclosing Dr. Parkhurst's report of which he said: "As this letter has been forwarded to Mayor Curley by Dr. Parkhurst I will appreciate it if you will publish it in The Congregationalist, with any comment you may make. Also Dr. Gregory's letter except one clause." Both the Parkhurst and Gregory letters were in approval of "The Birth of a Nation." Mr. Dixon referred to his opponents as a "Negro Inter-marriage Society," a term used in Mr. Gregory's letter to Mayor Curley and he gave the name of the organization as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and suggested that it might produce a play to answer him, and that, "The silly legal opposition they are giving will make me a millionaire if they keep it up." I did not reply to this letter.

On the morning of April 9, 1915, Thomas Dixon called at my office and I had a long talk with him about "The Birth of a Nation." He tried to convince me that it deserved my approval. He referred especially to the favorable reports of Dr. Parkhurst and Mr. Gregory. Mr. Dixon asked what I thought of Dr. Parkhurst's approval of the play. I replied that the evidence which had come to me was so strongly against the play that I was not influenced by Dr. Parkhurst, but that I would try

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to judge the play impartially when I saw it. He talked at length with reference to the artistic and dramatic merits of the play and of its value for the teaching of history, and ridiculed those who disapproved it. In reply to my questions with reference to the treatment of the Negro race in the play, he said that the subject was a debate, that he presented one side and that those who disagreed were at liberty to present the other side.

Mr. Dixon admitted that some of the scenes as originally presented in New York were too strongly suggestive of immorality and that he told Mr. Griffith they went too far.

I asked Mr. Dixon what his real purpose was in having "The Birth of a Nation" produced, what he hoped to accomplish by it. He began to read from the copy of Thomas B. Gregory's letter to Mayor Curley six things that Mr. Gregory said the play did in its effect on an audience. I interrupted to say, "Yes, but what is your chief purpose, what do you really want to accomplish through the influence of this play?" He replied in substance that he wanted to teach the people of the United States, especially the children, that the true history of the Reconstruction Period was as it was represented in "The Birth of a Nation." He said that in the play he presented the historical fact that Thaddeus Stevens became dictator of the United States government immediately after the death of President Lincoln, and that he appeared in the play under the name of Stoneman. Mr. Dixon said that one purpose in the play was to suggest Stevens' immorality in his relationship to his colored mistress for many years. He said the alleged sensual character of this woman, who in the play is called "Lydia Brown, Stoneman's mulatto housekeeper," was emphasized. Mr. Dixon described bad conditions in the South during the Reconstruction Period, alleging that the Negroes gained control politically incited chiefly by Thaddeus Stevens, that the white Southerners were insulted, assaulted, robbed and disfranchised and that white girls and women were in constant danger of assault by colored men. He emphasized the alleged dominant passion of colored men to have sexual rela-

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tions with white women and said that one purpose in his play was to create a feeling of abhorrence in white people, especially white women against colored men. Mr. Dixon said that his desire was to prevent the mixing of white and Negro blood by intermarriage. I asked him what he had to say about the mixing of the blood outside marriage and if it was not true that white men had forced their sexual relations upon colored girls and women all through the period of slavery, thus begetting children of mixed blood outside marriage, and if it was not true, as I am creditably informed, that such conditions prevail to a wide extent even among white men who occupy high social and political positions in the South to-day.

Mr. Dixon hesitated and finally answered that there was less of such conditions than there had been. Mr. Dixon said that the Ku Klux Klan was formed to protect the white women from Negro men, to restore order and to reclaim political control for the white people of the South. He said that the Ku Klux Klan was not only engaged in restoring law and order, but was of a religious nature, as represented in the play, having religious ceremonies and using the symbol of the cross. He said that the best white men of the South were in it, that Mr. Dixon's father was a Baptist minister in North Carolina and left his church to join the Ku Klux Klan, and that he remained with the organization until it was disbanded.

I asked Mr. Dixon what solution of the race problem he presented in "The Birth of a Nation" and he replied that his solution was Lincoln's plan. He said this was the colonization of the Negroes in Africa or South America, which he said President Lincoln favored during the last of the Civil War. Mr. Dixon said that he wished to have that plan carried out, that he wished to have all Negroes removed from the United States and that he hoped to help in the accomplishment of that purpose by the "Birth of a Nation."

I suggested the difficulty of getting ten million people out of the country, and asked if he seriously advocated such a scheme. He replied with great earnestness that he did, that it was possible to create public sentiment such that a beginning

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could be made in the near future, that a large faction of the Negroes themselves would co-operate in the enterprise and that within a century we could get rid of all Negroes.

Mr. Dixon informed me that the first presentation of "The Birth of a Nation" in Boston would be given that evening for censorship before the mayor and other city officials and newspaper critics and gave me two tickets for that exhibition. He said that in anticipation of a hostile demonstration he and his associates would have thirteen Pinkertons scattered through the audience at the first performance and that as many or more Pinkertons would be employed in the Tremont Theatre at the exhibitions that would follow in Boston, with orders to rush anyone into the street instantly who started any disturbance. He said that he had feared there would be trouble in New York and that many Pinkertons were employed when the show was presented in New York, but that up to the time I saw Mr. Dixon there had been no disturbance in the Liberty Theatre, where the play was presented in New York. Mr Dixon said that he owned a one-fourth interest in the "Birth of a Nation" Company.

I asked Mr. Dixon to what cities the show would be taken next and he replied that all plans had been held up until they knew the result of the protests in Boston. He said he regarded Boston as the critical point for their enterprise, that it was more likely to object to such a play than any other city and that he and his associates believe that if they could get by in Boston they would be able to go anywhere else in the country with the show without trouble.

As he went away he asked me to let him know what I thought of the play after I had seen it and expressed the hope that I would approve it.

I saw the "Birth of a Nation" that evening, April 9, and saw it again three weeks later, after omissions had been made to comply with the decision of Judge Dowd. I have expressed my disapproval of "The Birth of a Nation," following each view of it on the grounds of falsifying history, in a riot of emotions glorifying crime, especially lynching, immorality, inviting prejudice against the Negro race, falsely representing the char-

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acter of colored Americans and teaching the undemocratic, unchristian and unlawful doctrine that all colored people should be removed from the United States. I especially disapprove the play because Mr. Dixon frankly explained to me that his purpose in the play was to promote a propaganda with the desire to accomplish the results that I have stated.

ROLFE COBLEIGH.

Personally appeared Rolfe Cobleigh and made oath to the truth of the foregoing affidavit by him subscribed before me in Boston, Massachusetts, this 26th day of May, A.D. 1915.

GEORGE R. BRACKETT,

Notary Public.

PICTURES THE NEGRO AS A MORAL PERVERT

STATE OF NEW YORK,
COUNTY OF NEW YORK.

I, Jacques Loeb, Member of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, New York, testify herewith as follows:

I have seen the moving picture play entitled "The Birth of a Nation" and have been shocked by the bold attempts in this play to picture the Negro as a fiendish moral pervert.

I have also been shocked by the fact that the audience became a victim of this vicious attempt at arousing race hatred as shown in the applause given whenever Negroes were insulted or attacked in the play.

JACQUES LOEB.

Sworn to before me this 6th day of April, 1915.

ARTHUR HERRMAN,
Notary Public.

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GRAVE INJUSTICE TO COLORED PEOPLE

Miss Jane Addams of Hull House, Chicago, and I saw a performance of the second act of the film drama called "The Birth of a Nation." We were both painfully exercised over the exhibition.

I should say that the authors' interpretation of the period of reconstruction and its presentation at this time is a grave injustice to the colored people and to my mind is fraught with danger to any community that permits it to be given.

The play purports to be history and even if it were accurate it is too near the painful period that it depicts to be given without danger of inciting hate, hostility, prejudice and sectionalism.

It cannot be a sincere attempt to depict history or something would be indicated of the fact that nowhere is there record of any outrage upon white women by the colored men during the entire war time. Nowhere in the film is there any reference to the faithfulness and loyalty and protection by the colored men of the families committed to their charge while the white men were at war.

On the other hand the colored men are shown to be beasts and a type to be feared and detested.

The audience indicated by its applause reaction to the appeals to their prejudice and hate of the black people.

New York's colored population succeeded admirably in controlling disapproval and protest against the film. They have presented a dignified contrast to the incendiarism exhibited at the Liberty Theatre, but I doubt whether it is reasonable to expect further forbearance of their part.

Having seen the film play I feel it right to urge responsible officials to withhold permission for the presentation of the second act, or at least to insist upon elimination of the objectionable and inciting features.

LILLIAN D. WALD,
Head Resident, Henry Street Settlement.
New York

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PERNICIOUS MORALLY AND ARTISTICALLY

"The Birth of a Nation" is pernicious both morally and artistically. The whole purpose of the pictures is so meretricious in both racial and sectional elements that antipathies are aroused among the spectators. There is no doubt of the effort to make the Negro contemptible; that he should be made responsible for the inhumanity of his neighbors is stretching the point a little too far. An author like Mr. Dixon and the producer, Mr. Griffith, ought to realize that if the Negro was as bad as they paint him in these films he was what the South made him; he was the shadow of her own substance; and pride of race, if there were any in the white South, ought to suppress this exposition of their own shame.

In any work that pretends to art it is the motive that is vital and if it tends to be harmful should be suppressed. Hate is the very source of this production. Here it is a hate that reacts upon the hater. It is not only the hate of the South against the Negro, but against the North. It is shown in the figure of Sumner. The whole episode which leads up to the young girl's leap "through the opal gates of death" is ridiculous—ridiculous because at its worst it only symbolizes the law of compensation. There would be no toleration of a similar episode upon the stage in either film or drama reproduced from occurrences among whites in almost any American city. The reading of vice commission reports would furnish an ample storehouse for material. One is bound to condemn a production of this kind for the good of the entire community.

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWATE.

GRAVE AND INTOLERABLE INSULT

I learn with deep regret that it is planned to present "The Birth of a Nation" in Boston. I trust that the Mayor will forbid the presentation of this play. Its presentation ought not

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to be permitted in a decent, self-respecting community. It is certain to excite prejudice and animosity between the negro and the white races. It is not history but caricature. It is a grave and intolerable insult to the negro race and I trust that your city with all its fine traditions will not permit this injustice to be done within its borders.

Sincerely yours,

STEPHEN S. WISE.

PORTRAYS NEGROES AS BEASTS

I, Oswald Garrison Villard, testify that I have witnessed the performance of "The Birth of a Nation" at the Liberty Theatre in New York, and that I unhesitatingly testify that I consider said production improper, immoral, and unjust to the colored people of the country. I further testify that if the matter of race were eliminated, the play would, in my judgment, as to the objectionable scenes at least, be unfit for public production, since there is a suggestiveness about it of the kind which physicians and alienists know too often incites to crime with certain types of minds. The attack upon the negro in this play is entirely unnecessary; it is not directly related to the story, nor is it proportional to the space given to the big things with which the play deals. In my judgment it is a deliberate attempt to humiliate ten million American citizens, and to portray them as nothing but beasts. In my judgment the play should not be tolerated in any American city.

OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD.

TENDS TO CORRUPT PUBLIC MORALS

To the Editor of The Herald:

I was very sorry to see Mr. Fleischer's letter in regard to "The Birth of a Nation," and I note especially his statement that it aims "only to present a historic picture of a rather unknown period of American history during which the Negro was given powers which he had not then been prepared to use." Nothing can be more misleading, and it is precisely because this period of American history is, to our shame, so little known

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that we object to the gross perversion of that history which this play presents.

The theory of the play that the Negro in slavery and devoted to his master was in his place, but that given his freedom and the right to vote, and thereby placed in power, he developed an unbridled passion which led him to pursue the white women of the South, and that the Ku Klux Klan was formed to protect these women from outrage—this is absolutely untrue, and the mere dates disprove it.

Andrew Johnson took office in April, 1865, and before Congress met in the following December he had appointed a provisional Governor in each state, and provided for the election and organization of state government in which Negroes were uniformly denied the right of suffrage and the right to hold office. This was white reconstruction and the governments were in the hands of those lately engaged in rebellion. The Legislatures thus created passed statutes "which reduced the freedmen to a condition of peonage, punished their breaches of contract as crimes, denied them the power to acquire real estate or carry arms," and in various other ways reduced them substantially to the condition of slaves. An association of "regulators" had already been formed in Georgia, of whom it was said in the New York Herald:

"It is needless to say that their attention is largely directed to maintaining quiet and submission among the blacks. The shooting or stringing up of some obstreperous 'nigger' by the regulators is so common an occurrence as to excite little remark."

All over the South conditions were substantially the same, as was abundantly shown by a report made by Carl Schurz, who was sent down by President Johnson to examine and report. This was the state of the South which confronted Congress when, on December 4, 1865, it met for the first time after Mr. Lincoln's assassination. White reconstruction had been tried and had failed disastrously. The Ku Klux Klan was organized in 1866, and of it the Encyclopedia American says:

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"Formed originally for purposes of amusement only, it soon developed into an association of 'regulators,' and became notorious for the lawless deeds of violence performed in its name. The proceedings of the Ku Klux in the Southern states were a feature of the determined struggle to withhold from the emancipated slaves the right of voting. The outrages and murders which convulsed the country in 1868-69 ended in calling out of troops and the formal disbandment of the society in March of the latter year."

The first act which assured the Negroes the right to vote by setting aside the existing state governments and providing that no seceded state should be readmitted to the Union unless its constitution gave the suffrage to white and black alike was not passed till about February 15, 1867. It was not till after May, 1868, that acts were passed admitting the southern states, and the last of these, Virginia, Mississippi and Texas, were not admitted till 1870. Only after these acts were passed and after the fundamental conditions which they imposed were complied with did the governments of the southern states come under the control of the colored voters. The Ku Klux Klan had really run its course before the colored voters exercised any substantial power.

This simple chronological statement could be much amplified, but it is sufficient to show how absolutely false is the view of history presented by this play. It is an effort to mislead the people of this country who are ignorant of these facts, to excite a strong feeling against the colored people already suffering everywhere from race prejudice, and to strengthen the hands of those who would deny them their equal rights as citizens. If it is immoral to bear false witness against one's neighbor, to excite hate, to say those things which directly lead to disorder, assault, and perhaps homicide; unless, in a word, the only immorality is sexual immorality, this play tends to corrupt public morals and should be suppressed, as it certainly would be if, instead of libelling the weakest among our fellow-citizens, it were in like manner to attack a body of great political strength.

MOORFIELD STOREY.

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PACK OF PICTURED LIES

To the Editor of The Herald:

Having seen the moving-picture show called "The Birth of a Nation," and found it to be very different from what I had been led to expect, I am strongly impressed that the controlling reason why it ought to be excluded from exhibition in Massachusetts has not been brought out as it should be.

I supposed its most offensive feature to be its defamation of the Negro. Much as I object to this, on grounds both of justice and policy, the fundamental objection to this play lies deeper. It is covert, but most skilful and insidious defamation of the Union cause, and apotheosis of slavery and rebellion. We of the white race should be first to rise against it, and we do ourselves no credit by leaving it to our colored fellow-citizens to protest. With the exception of the Lincoln episodes, where it cunningly defers to a sentiment that cannot safely be trifled with even in the law-abiding North—though it is impossible to overlook a touch of coarse caricature in the face of the Lincoln—it is, from the rising of the curtain unto the going down of the same, a pack of pictured lies so grotesquely false that but for their malice and their power of mischief, as addressed to the eyes of a generation comparatively uninformed, they would be simply laughable. Of some of the displayed incidents most calculated to exalt rebellion and excite sympathy for the (white) victims of reconstruction, probably there is not one authenticated instance in the whole history of the war and reconstruction period. Purporting to be historical, it is history upside down, a complete inversion of historical truth. If special pains are taken to vilify the Negro, it is because he is the special object of the propaganda for repeal of the 14th and 15th amendments of which this play is unquestionably a part and if tolerated will be a subtle and effective instrument. The most amazing feature of the whole performance is the glorification of the Ku Klux Klan, for which alone it might have been composed. Fancy a depiction of that "secret, black

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and midnight" horde of lawless ruffians whose career of outrage and murder is unhappily part of the history of the country, as arising out of a chivalrous purpose to protect white women against Negro lust, drawing applause, probably sincere, from an honest Massachusetts audience! Yet they emerge at the end with the principal honors of the piece.

This pictorial recrudescence of the rebellion is a gross libel upon the Union cause, upon its public leaders, Lincoln only excepted, upon every soldier, living or dead, who fought for it, and upon the whole people who supported it. Slavery and rebellion were right, the South was outraged by emancipation, the attempt to secure the Negro in his freedom was a crime for which wholesale murder was the proper remedy, the Negro was unfit for freedom and is unfit for civil rights, the Yankees were vandals, the rebels the true chivalry, and the Ku Klux Klan the heroes of the whole drama. This is the moral of the tale, conveyed with skilful innuendo and most consummate art. It gambles on the public ignorance of our own history, and as a vast majority of people are more impressed by what they see than by what they read or hear, it is liable to win by permanently lodging a radically false conception in the public mind.

The selection of Massachusetts as the field for the introduction of this spectacle to the public, impudent as that is, affords the opportunity to deal with it here as it deserves. In the South, with conditions reversed, such a show and its perpetrators would be lynched. This is not the Massachusetts way. But unless we find a way to effectively resent this libel alike upon our citizenry and our history, let us destroy our soldiers' monuments, give the battle-flags at the State House to the dust heap, abolish our Memorial Day, and confess ourselves unfit to inherit the traditions of Massachusetts, in our impotence to vindicate them or the memory of the men who made them.

A. E. PILLSBURY.

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THE ASSASSINATION OF A RACE

To the Honorable James M. Curley, Mayor; Stephen O'Meara, Police Commissioner:—

Dear Sirs—Last evening I witnessed by invitation the pre-public private performance in Boston of the moving picture spectacle entitled "The Birth of a Nation," produced in the Tremont Theatre. Francis Hackett, the theatrical critic of The New Republic, says in his issue of March 20, that the film is "aggressively vicious and defamatory. It is spiritual assassination. It degrades the censors that passed it and the white race that endures it." It was with curiosity that I accepted the invitation of the editor of one of our leading religious weekly papers to be present and give my judgment on the performance.

The performance is misnamed. It should be called "The Assassination of a Race."

The play is in two parts. The first part portrays life before the war, introduces the characters who appear in the love story that is woven into the production; reproduces battle scenes during the war and closes with Lincoln's assassination.

During the war pictures a Southern colonel (white) makes a magnificent charge; Old Glory is heroically defended (by whites); the colored soldiers' part is a troop of negro raiders destroying a civilian's house and shooting an old man.

When the war is over we have a representation of apparently drunken negro soldiers in a Southern town; a ludicrous scene of negroes in court; a scene in the Legislature with the negro members leering in a licentious manner at the white women in the gallery; the exceptional male negro in the performance who has good qualities strung up and whipped by the other negroes; the pursuit of a black beast after a charming, beautiful white girl for the purpose of raping her, which she avoids by throwing herself from a cliff; the death scene of the girl; an attempt by the negro leader to rape a white Congressman's daughter through the mockery of a false marriage, with the girl screaming for help, then gagged and finally taken in the

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negro's arms and lugged away. Without going into further detail, every beastly, contemptible characteristic is laid upon the black race, and emphasized by contrast with the heroic virtues of the whites, saving and excepting, of course, those few whites who lead the colored devils.

A young man who saw the film in New York remarked on coming out of the show house "I'd like to kill every nigger in the country." He was an average young man. It was a natural remark. If the negro race is as represented in this performance I should feel as he does. If this film is allowed to be produced, there are thousands of others who will be taught to feel as he does.

The play was collaborated and is based upon a novel called "The Clansman." It is so advertised. Five years ago a dramatized production of "The Clansman" was produced at a theatre in Boston and was stopped by your predecessor, John F. Fitzgerald. Common decency demands the suppression of this movie show.

At Friday evening's performance the collaborator stated between the acts that he claimed the same right to give this performance that a historian has to write history. A lie can be told by omission as well as by what is said. Whatever incidents may or may not have happened in reconstruction times the omission of the good, and the slanderous exaggeration of individual crimes until the race is confounded with the individual criminal so that an average spectator will say "I'd like to kill every nigger in America," is not history. Would you allow such a rotten history to be used as a text book in our schools? Why then, under the guise of history, allow it to be used as a text for children in our public halls?

The facts are that during the Civil war when the white men were fighting at the front, the Southern women and children at home were practically defenceless. What race ever kept better faith than did the colored people of the South with those unprotected ones during the war? What soldiers of the North fought more gallantly than the colored regiment decimated before Fort Wagner? What down-trodden race in the same

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space of time ever made more progress both in education and material prosperity than have the colored people of this country since the close of the Civil War?

If mud-slinging is to be propagated by movies, what is it that has produced the race of mulattos in this country? Not the rape of white girls by colored men. If history is to be taught, let us have history.

The play is a slanderous assassination of a race. What its purpose is I do not know. Probably commercialism, as it is spectacular, and if permitted will draw crowds. Its result will be to increase race hatred. What we need in this country, now above all times, is peace and harmony. We have 10,000,000 colored citizens in our land. They are here to stay. Why let this negro-baiting slanderer of the past come here waving his bloody shirt and stirring up race hatred? We want less of this and more of Christ's "Sermon on the Mount."

The play is a public menace and should be suppressed. If you expect our colored population to be law-abiding citizens, the law must give them equal protection with the other races. No movie play which slandered the Irish, or the Catholics, or the Yankees as this play slanders the negro race would be allowed an hour in Boston, and I challenge any person to see this performance and then deny this statement. Why not give fair play to the weaker race as well as to the stronger, a race more sinned against than sinning?

The manager advertises his play by letters of encomium from a few members of the clergy. There are thousands of clergymen and they are not responsible for the tastes of an exceptional few. The minister's calling is a high one and the church, taken as a whole, is a magnificent engine for good. On the other hand, we executed a minister only three years ago.

The great abolitionist, Wendell Phillips, brought his wonderful eloquence to bear for the Irish at a time when they stood in sore need. It takes little imagination to see his shade now looking upon this city governed by a Mayor representing the race for whom he fought. What will he see?

J. MOTT HALLOWELL.

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MASSACHUSETTS' CHIEF GLORY

My dear Mr. Hallowell:—

I very much regret that I cannot be at the hearing to-morrow, but I have speaking engagements at Yale University to-day and to-morrow and cannot break them. I have never seen "The Birth of a Nation" film, but if as reported to me on excellent authority, it palliates the Ku Klux Klan and insults and reviles a race comprising 10,000,000 of our population, it should not be permitted to be exhibited. As to the Ku Klux Klan, if one is ignorant of its criminal character and of its murders, burnings and other detestable crimes, let him read the reports of the trials in the U. S. Circuit Court at Columbia at the November term of 1871. It is a gross offence against the idea of government by law that the band so responsible for them should be glorified or represented to-day in any part of the country in any favorable light. As to the negro race after the wrongs it has suffered, if there is anyone in the country who can revile it and especially in connection with its struggle into citizenship after generations of slavery he should do this reviling in some other state than Massachusetts, whose chief glory it is that she was in the forefront of those who led that race out of bondage.

Sincerely yours,

S. W. McCALL.

AGAINST PUBLIC POLICY

I do not know that any word from me can much aid your efforts to stay the presentation of "The Birth of a Nation," yet I feel so strongly about it that I cannot keep wholly silent.

Why should it hold the stage against such vehement and feeling protests of great numbers of our people? When I ask this question, I am told that it is "history," "truth," "realism." Fine words these, which may be used as cloak beneath which to smuggle in much evil. The holds and the "between-decks" of

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slave-ships in the middle passage of truth and history; so are slave auctions, and flogging; so are lynchings, burnings, hangings and shootings. In what section of the country would these scenes be vividly reproduced with impunity because of their historical and educational character? "Truth" and "history" should not be so presented as to become a gross offense, a cruel insult to a great body of respectable, honest, worthy persons. No one respects history more than I do, (who have had something to do with it in my days,) but the more I respect it, the more I resent its misuse. To use it for the purpose, or even with the result, of outraging the feelings of a multitude of our fellow-citizens, is not only cruel, and against good humanity, but it is distinctly against public policy, which pre-eminently calls for harmony and good feeling between all fellow-citizens.

I am, with best wishes for your success,

Very truly yours,

JOHN T. MORSE, JR.

NOT ENDORSED BY THE PRESIDENT

Referring to your recent favor containing copies of statements in which it was claimed that President Wilson had given his endorsement and approval of the photo-play which was presented before the President some time ago called "The Birth of a Nation," I beg to say that I called at the White House, and the President's Secretary the Honorable J. P. Tumulty made a most emphatic denial of the above statement that the President had endorsed the play. I have to-day received from Mr. Tumulty the following letter:

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THE WHITE HOUSE,

Washington, April 28, 1915.

My dear Mr. Thacher:—

Replying to your letter and enclosures, I beg to say that it is true that "The Birth of a Nation" was produced before the President and his family at the White House, but the President was entirely unaware of the character of the play before it was presented and has at no time expressed his approbation of it. Its exhibition at the White House was a courtesy extended to an old acquaintance.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) J. P. TUMULTY,

Secretary to the President.

I am glad to send you this official denial, and permit me to say in closing that when I was last in Massachusetts I saw the play in question, "The Birth of a Nation," and I heartily agree with the statement of Booker T. Washington that it is a "hurtful play" and one likely to "stir up race prejudice."

Yours very sincerely,

THOMAS C. THACHER.

UNDERMINES AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

In an address to a great throng of citizens at the State House, April 19, Governor Walsh said among other things,

"I sympathize with you tremendously. If there is anything tending more to destroy and undermine American Institutions and American liberty, it is race or religious prejudice. I don't propose, while I am Governor of this State, to allow any movement arousing antagonism to any race of people in Massachusetts. If any such movements are to be carried on in Massa-

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chusetts they have got to be carried on underground where the sunlight does not shine.

"In good time I hope to be able to assist you. So, let me ask you to go away peacefully and orderly, and conscious of the fact that you enjoy just as full measure of rights as any other class of people, and that your race and your color have as much right to be respected as any other race or color, that you have no reason at all to be ashamed or humiliated at the fact that there may be here and there something objectionable to you and your people.

"Massachusetts has always been a friend of your race, and your men have fought and died for Massachusetts as bravely as any other men of any other race, and you are all loyal to her to-day.

"The Constitution of this government guarantees to every man, woman and child an equal opportunity in life, and those things which tend to and create prejudice and hatreds and bigotry must be eliminated, not by force, but by law. Through your committee I will keep in touch with the situation."

"I don't suppose there was ever before a day like this witnessed in the State House in all its history. Men and women coming here with tears in their eyes, asking the Governor to protect them from race hatred! I hope it will never happen again.

"I want you to know that I intend to assert every influence and power that I possess to keep Massachusetts free from race or religious prejudices. If our government has become great and has given to the world evidence of its God-given mission to mankind, it is due chiefly that here all men and all races are guaranteed equality of opportunity for the enjoyment of the blessings which the framers of our government guaranteed to all our citizens, and for which 140 years ago to-day the farmers of Massachusetts struck the first blow at Concord Bridge."

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GROSS CARICATURES OF THE NEGRO

I am greatly surprised to learn from your letter that I have been quoted as approving of the scenes in "The Birth of a Nation."

I thoroughly disapprove of very many of them—the more so by reason of the fact that the wonderful power of the presentation and the order of the scenes develop the immediate sympathy of so many for the wrong side, that is, with the whites when they are shooting and killing, which is inhuman under any conditions. Again, I object strongly to the grossly unfair portrayal of any people through the exhibit of their unfortunate members who are degraded. I thought the gross caricatures of the Negro were so evidently unfair that the reaction on the average mind would work in favor of the race, and the partial excitement of prejudice against him a gross outrage and a most unpatriotic and unsocial thing.

I understand that there have been many scenes cut out since I saw the play which strained my nerves and outraged my feelings while it distressed me to see such exceptional ability of organization directed into the wrong channels.

I understand that there was no intent to injure the public estimate of the Negro, but the thought that the extreme action of some Southern white men of the Ku Klux Klan would be justified to other sections. I thought however, that it placed those men in the light of doing great injury to the true interest of the South. I object most strongly on that ground to the portrayal as I saw it. As a native of Georgia, I especially deplore all such wicked teachings of race prejudice and feeling. I spoke frankly of my thought to some of those interested in the play and suggested that a re-arrangement with much cutting be discussed with those who were protesting with so much warrant.

Yours truly,

GEORGE FOSTER PEABODY.

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P.S.—I have since learned from many testimonies that the effect of the presentation in New York is to develop much expression of prejudice against the Negro, and I know it is not justified.

G. F. PEABODY.

MIGHT LEAD TO SERIOUS RACE RIOTS

My dear Mr. Loud:—

In response to your request of to-day I beg to state that I was among the minority of the National Board of Censorship as to "The Birth of a Nation." I believe, as did the minority of the members, that the picture portrayed the Negro in such a brutal and degrading way that half of it, or the second part, should be either eliminated or cut so completely that but little of it would be left. However, the majority of the Board thought otherwise.

My reason for feeling as I do is that the Negro is a citizen. He is the most helpless of our citizens, and I felt that this picture seen by millions of people would add an even greater burden to the race problem and might lead to serious race riots and assaults wherever it was produced. I feel that this is particularly true in the South.

Very sincerely yours,

*FREDERIC C HOWE.

*Ex-president National Board of Censorship.

DEEPLY OFFENSIVE TO DECENCY

My dear Mr. Loud:—

In reply to your inquiry, I will say frankly that, as a member of the General Committee of the *National Board of

*This board has no official standing.

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Censorship of Motion Pictures, I spoke and voted against the passing of the film entitled "The Birth of a Nation," both on general and particular grounds.

I have seen the picture as exhibited to the public and I consider some scenes in the first part as deeply offensive to decency and good taste, and I consider a large portion of the second part as historically unfair and unjust and as being calculated to both arouse and deepen race prejudice.

This picture calls on the part of those who see it for a discrimination to which very few people are equal, and I regard the general influence of the second part of the picture as morally and socially harmful to an extreme degree.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLES S. MACFARLAND.

SUGAR COATING FOR BLACK POISON

I wish you every success in your attempt to suppress "The Birth of a Nation." I saw it recently in its expurgated form at the Tremont Theatre. The good acting, the appeal to the universal sentiment of pity and the dramatic skill with which the play is produced, make it all the more pernicious for its purpose is unmistakable—the discrediting of American Negroes.

"The Birth of a Nation" is a prostitution of dramatic art for a propaganda of prejudice. I am glad that so many of the Southern mayors have forbidden its production in their cities, and I am surprised that it has not met with like opposition in the North.

The running commentary which accompanies the play, claiming historical motive and moral purpose, and the attempt to couple it with the cause of peace and righteousness is too feeble to deceive any thoughtful person. It is sugar coating for a dose of black poison. It expresses the pious hope that its

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portrayal of the horrors of war may lead to the triumph of peace, while in the most unmistakable manner it is sowing the seed of strife.

It has been my mission for years, as President of Atlanta University, to oppose race prejudice and to foster a spirit of fairness and justice between the races. Let anyone imagine how the students at Atlanta University would feel if obliged to witness this play. Many people have recently asked me my opinion of the play. It was on this account that I went to see it the other night. It's tendency is to undo the work of half a century in training public sentiment, and I therefore appeal to all fair minded, justice loving people to use their influence against it. Success to you.

EDWARD T. WARE.

PLAY FUNDAMENTALLY WRONG

"Editor Atlanta Independent:—

"Sir:—I wish to urge our people everywhere to 'take time by the forelock' and adopt in advance such measures as will prevent the production of the photo play, 'The Birth of a Nation' in any community, North or South. It will be a serious and grave mistake to wait until the pictures are actually being exhibited in these cities and then attempt to close them up. The weakness of this plan has been clearly demonstrated in New York and Boston.

"Another and more important reason for taking preventive measures is that once the play has been put on in a city, the managers encourage and even skilfully initiate opposition on account of the advertising the play receives when attempts are made to stop it. The people in Chicago are acting very wisely in forestalling its appearance; and this is the policy which it would be well for every community to pursue.

"In each town where there is a possibility of this play being put on, it would be well to have a committee of citizens representing the churches, the schools and the business men to take the initiative in lodging a suitable objection.

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"The play is fundamentally wrong in that it attempts to deal with the development of America since the abolition of slavery by ignoring the substantial progress of the Negro race and emphasizing the cruel misunderstanding of the readjustment period in which unfortunate individuals of both races figured. No matter how many other artistic and historic features the play may have, its ultimate result will be to intensify race prejudice and thereby do great and lasting harm to both races.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON."

A REPROACH TO OUR CITY

(DR. FRANCIS H. ROWLEY, in *Our Dumb Animals*, June, 1915.)

This magazine has stood, from the day of its inception, for justice and fair play. It has by no means confined its interest to animals. Men, women, children, the victims of greed, oppression, injustice, prejudice, have found on its pages an outspoken championship. It has asked of no man the color of his skin, nor of any man the shibboleth of his sect. It has never been able to understand how anything but a man's inner spirit could be the measure of his manhood, or anything but the fruit of his creed the test of his religion.

It would therefore be untrue to itself if it failed to denounce the attempt that has been made here in Boston to humiliate and vilify the colored American citizen. This is what the photograph known as "The Birth of a Nation" does. Not only does it falsify history to suit its own purpose, representing the Ku Klux Klan as a body of chivalrous knights, bearing the cross as their holy standard, like the crusaders of old; not only does it falsify the character of the Negro of war times and imply that he is still unfit for citizenship in an enlightened republic, and present him in guises that excite hostility against him, but it appears to have been most skilfully and deliberately planned to arouse and widen in the North that prejudice against the Negro that has characterized the worst elements of the South. It holds up for hissing and hate a mulatto on the ground that he wants

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to marry a white girl, but sweeps the audience on without time for anyone to remember that that very mulatto face is the undeniable witness to the fact that some white man outraged his colored mother.

At a day when all Europe is a battle-field where race prejudice is reaping the whirlwind of its own sowing, and when we all must realize how easily that spirit may be kindled here, to permit the continuance of this exhibition in Boston, the home of Garrison and Phillips and Sumner, is a reproach to our city.

It is devoutly hoped that the attempt now being made to stop it by some legislative act will have been successful ere these words are read. We are perfectly sure that no other race of our citizens would ever have endured the insults, the wrongs, the lynchings, the robberies of rights guaranteed under the constitution without seeking by some other than legal methods those rights the appeal to law has seemed impotent to secure.

GREAT PUBLIC MEETING

May 2, 1915 a great public meeting of protest was held in Tremont Temple at which Dr. Francis H. Rowley presided. The speakers were Dr. Charles W. Eliot, Miss Adeline Moffat, Rev. Henry Francis Smith, Mrs. Susan W. Fitzgerald, Rev. Samuel M. Crothers, D.D., Judge Philip Rubenstein, Mr. Rolfe Cobleigh, Prof. Henry G. Pearson and Rabbi M. M. Eichler.

All the speeches were noteworthy. There is room for but two of them.

ADDRESS OF DR. CHARLES W. ELIOT

Mr. Chairman:—I ought to state at once that I have not seen this play. One does not need to see it, in order to learn what its manifest tendencies and purposes are. In the next place, I ought to say that I do not look upon the production of this play primarily as a thing insulting or injurious to the black race. That is not the consideration which chiefly interests me on this question whether the play ought to be produced or not. The question which interests me as an educator

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is what effect the play, exhibited all over the United States, is likely to produce on the white people of the country, and particularly on the rising generation.

I want to say, in the first place, that it presents an extraordinary misrepresentation of the birth of this nation. It has been a favorite statement of the Southern white men who supported the War, who fought the War through and survived it, that this nation first came into existence at the close of the Civil War. Now, that is not at all true; and it is not expedient, in my opinion, that this false doctrine with regard to the birth of the nation should be taught all over this country to the rising generation, unless it can be immediately and constantly denied, wherever this play is presented. This nation was created, was born, when the Constitution of the United States was adopted. To be sure, the view that the Constitution of the United States was an indestructible contract was firmly established by the War. This Union was then guaranteed to be "one and inseparable."

Secondly, this play is obviously intended to maintain the thesis that the Ku Klux Klan was an inevitable thing and, on the whole, a righteous thing,—that it was the necessary defence of the Southern communities against the colored legislatures led by Northern white men. That argument reminds me of nothing so much as the argument of the German people to-day—at any rate, of the German rulers to-day—that a contract may be destroyed, torn up, utterly disregarded, because of military necessity. The situation of the Southern communities was a grievous one at the time the Ku Klux Klan originated; but that fact did not in the least justify the utter lawlessness of the Ku Klux Klan; and no worse lesson can now be set before the white people of this country, and particularly before the young people, than this teaching of the play that lawlessness, being, as it was wrongly imagined, necessary, was therefore justifiable and indeed admirable. That is a most mischievous teaching in a free commonwealth.

But, again, I hear that one of the objects of this play is to suggest to the mind of the American people that the Fourteenth

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and Fifteenth Amendments to our Constitution ought to be repealed. What are those amendments? What were they meant for? They were meant to secure to all the people of the country, and particularly to the recently emancipated slaves, the ordinary rights of personal freedom and public justice. Are we going to suffer this recommendation of the repeal of those amendments to be set forth in every large community in this country without seeing that the antidote to that poison is supplied?

Again, there is found among the suggestions of this play the proposal that the whole colored race should be removed from this country, and carried over to Africa or some other now unoccupied or barbarous region. It is not conceivable that the colored people of this country should go to Africa except on compulsion; they would have to be driven thither; they would have to be driven by force of arms; nothing short of violent compulsion would get them there. What an abominable outrage that would be, perpetrated by the white people of this country against the colored people! It is inconceivable! It is monstrous! And yet that is one of the suggestions of this play.

It is represented, indeed, that the colored race might find a paradise in Liberia; and it is said that the white race would be much better off here without the colored, and that this is a white man's country. Now, let us recall for a moment how these colored people came here. Who brought them here? What were their sufferings on the way? What have been their sufferings while here? Whose children are many of them today? The very worst feature of the Southern legislation concerning slavery was that item which made the child of a white man by a black mother his slave. The American people will never think of perpetrating the outrage of transporting these colored people across the seas against their will.

I come now to a question on which my own mind is not wholly clear, and therefore what I say will probably be obscure. I do not feel clear that it is the interest of the white people of this country to have this play suppressed. I am sure that the colored people have no serious interest in having this play

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suppressed. This play is said to insult the colored people. I beg to say to the colored people here present that they had better not feel insulted. They cannot be insulted. The progress of the colored people in this country since they ceased to be slaves is one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of civilization. Just think what the colored people have come up from. No colored person in the Southern States had any property, or could by any possibility hold any, under the regime of slavery. How is it now? They are holding large amounts of property in lands, buildings, and chattels. No colored person, under slavery, could be reasonably expected to make any distinction between mine and thine. He was either foolish or remarkably dutiful, if he did not take all the property of white people that he could safely appropriate. Such was the training which slavery supplied. Its effects will be perceptible for generations.

And how was it as to family relations? Under slavery in our Southern States no man had any legal right to wife or children; no black mother had any right to her children; every black woman was at the mercy of her master and his sons. From that state the Southern negro has now come up; and it is a marvel how quickly and how far he has advanced. My interest is not at all in the effects of this play on the negro race in our country. The negro race is taking care of itself, and has proved that it is wonderfully capable of so doing. It is the mental condition of the white race that I am concerned about, because of the false teaching of history, the false teaching concerning American ideals of liberty and justice, and the perversion of those ideals, which this play contains.

At this point my doubt as to what had better be done comes in. It is quite true, as several earlier speakers have said, that there has been a growing indifference among the white people, and particularly the young people of our country to all these questions about liberty and justice in the conduct of public affairs. This play, shown all about the country, will draw the attention of multitudes of people to those questions of public liberty and justice. If the presentation of this play

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is everywhere accompanied with a new exposition of what the American people stand for in this world, I am not sure that we shall not so win a good result, a beneficial result, a result well worth securing. Therefore I feel it desirable that whatever restrictive law is now adopted in Massachusetts shall be a general law of universal application for the prevention of improper, unsuitable, unpatriotic, unwise plays and moving pictures; and that it should not be based on the particular incident in Boston which we are now considering. I feel that as a teacher. I feel it, too, as one who has had many opportunities of defending the right principles concerning public liberty. I feel it very much as an advocate of public justice for many years. It was a great satisfaction to me to write the inscription on the back of the Shaw Monument on Boston Common; because it testified to what colored troops did during the Civil War in defence of the liberties of the entire American people, and to what the colored race deserves at the hands of that people.

Let us be careful, therefore, that we get a law from the present legislature which will do good by the year and by the decade here in Massachusetts. Let us not ask for it on account of this particular play,* but because we want a just and proper control of all plays, moving pictures, and dramatic representations that are to be set before the American public; and let us all remember what the American ideals are for the guidance of this nation, which has already existed for more than a century and a quarter, and we hope is going to exist for many centuries. They are just the ideals for which the freer nations in Europe are now contending,—liberty for all men, justice for all men without distinction of race, and then universal human brotherhood.

ADDRESS OF REV. SAMUEL M. CROTHERS, D.D.

Friends:—I come not to represent the bitterness of any people, but I would like to say a word for what I believe is the

* Dr. Eliot signed the petition to the Board of Censors to stop the play.

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real feeling of the conservative people of Boston to-day, people who have not as yet been roused by this particular issue, but who, I believe, will stand behind you now and in the future.

There has gone abroad, I think, and quite naturally, an impression that the Boston of fifty years ago, the Boston of moral idealism, has passed away; and I take it that in many different ways the feeling of the city of Boston is being tested to-day. Now, what is the fact, the real fact, in regard to the situation? More than fifty years have passed since one of the great questions that confronted the nation was, as men thought, settled. During the war of the Revolution, a patriot said, "These are the times that try men's souls." John Fiske said, "No; the years that tried men's souls were the years that immediately followed the Revolutionary War." It was the period that ended in the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. The adoption of the Constitution settled, as men thought, once for all, whether these independent states could form a perfect union. That was the great achievement of that period. Then came a long period of struggle, of misunderstanding; of all sorts of discussions, ending in a great civil war.

Now, what were the results of that great conflict? What did these men die for? One thing, by all consent, was settled at that time,—that this union is indissoluble. Now, that is something, when men in all parts of the country are agreed.

Another question that was settled at that time was the question of slavery. Lincoln's words of foreboding before the war, that this country could not exist as "a house divided against itself," half free, half slave—that question was settled once for all.

Then, at the end of that struggle, there came another question,—I should say a whole series of questions, arising one after another, involving the relations between the race set free from slavery and the rest of the nation.

Now, the whole serious history of the United States for the past fifty years has been the history of men and women, North and South, Negro and white, grappling with this great question,—how we are to live together in peace in this country? I say

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North and South, for the best men to-day are grappling with that question, they are trying to get away from the bitter memories of the Civil War, get away from the memory of slavery, get away from many ugly things that happened on both sides during the era of reconstruction. That is our effort; that is what we are trying to do; North and South, we are trying to do it.

What prevents us from doing it? We know that it is difficult; we know that it is hard; we know how far we have to go. Now, what is the most wicked thing that a man could do under those circumstances? Simply to revive all that is ugly and all that is hateful in that period which we are trying to put behind us? Good men of both races to-day seek to forget the things that are behind, and press forward to the things that are before, "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God." That is what they are trying to do. When we are trying to do that, trying with all our might, when educated men of both races recognize the great danger of ignorance of both races and of ignorant passions, then if someone should come to us and try to throw us back into that place from which we emerged, what should we say of him? I know of nothing better than the old Scripture words to describe the situation of trying to revive those memories and those passions "as a mad man who scattereth firebrands, arrows and death. So is every man that deceiveth his neighbor and says, 'Am I not in sport?'" Now, it is not sport. It is a propaganda against which we come here to protest. We are seeking the way, the Christian way, the civilized way of emerging from conditions in the past that we all recognize.

Now, I believe that it might be possible for a true artist, in the spirit of art, to tell the story of our American history, the good and the bad, in a way to show the condition from which we have emerged. But the man who would do that, and speak of the Negro race, must be a man who is able to stand on Boston Common before the Shaw Monument and look at those faces. There was a need of that monument to picture to posterity and to the people of this day the great meaning of that

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race emerging out of slavery and passing towards freedom and towards citizenship; and unless that is done we are misreading, misconceiving human history; and when purporting to write history one dares to throw upon the screen quotations from the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson,—when he does that when he purports to be teaching history, then every one who believes that the history of the nation is sacred must protest against it, and unless there is some way by which that protest can be made it is accepted as the voice and feeling of the present time. I will not stop to discuss it; I am willing to leave that to another occasion; but I know that there are some sins that cannot, in a free country made up of different races, be thus treated. No one has a right to treat the Catholic Church in that way, presenting upon the screen pictures calculated only to stir up Protestant indignation. No one has a right to treat Protestantism in that way.

A few years ago I read a book published by a certain society called "The Crimes of the Clergy," and they took every crime that had been committed by a clergyman in historic times, and put it in that book, and I suppose there were enough crimes to go around. But if that book were dramatized, and a whole army of clergymen were represented committing those crimes, I should protest, and so should every decent man. Each race, each sect, each party has in its past history done things which, taken out of their settings, could produce only prejudice against them. The great end of all true history is to show the causes and the reasons of things. The great purpose of all history in such a country as this is to show how we, made up of all races and conditions, can live together in peace and good-will; and I know of no way by which to preserve that state, to make possible the great nation which we here conceive to be possible, save that when any one party or sect or race is insulted, men of other parties and other sects and other races shall say, "You have struck me." That was the spirit of the man of Nazareth. "When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" The answer was, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto

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one of the least of these my disciples and my friends, ye have done it unto me." I would like to have the Christian Church rise to the thought of its Master; and when any master is grossly insulted for race or condition, the Church of Christ shall say, "Ye did it unto me."

FROM *LETTERS AND SPEECHES

"The effect of the play upon the beholder is that of horror as well as antagonism to the Negro race, especially because the play represents a whole city full of riotous and criminal Negroes."

JUDGE PHILIP RUBENSTEIN.

"It is a loathsome calumny of the Negro race and an insult to the South as well as the North."

ADELENE MOFFAT.

"The play is untrue to history. In my judgment it is certain to stir contempt for and to deepen prejudice against the colored people."

REV. CHRISTOPHER R. ELIOT

"The inference from such an exhibition is that such creatures are typical Negroes."

ELIZABETH C. PUTNAM.

"It does a grievous wrong to 10,000,000 of our fellow-citizens and is thereby a menace to our whole community."

GEORGE G. BRADFORD.

"It is three miles of filth. We believe this film teaches a propaganda for the purpose of so stirring up the people of the East and the West and the North that they would consent to allowing the Southern programme of disfranchisement, segregation and lynching of the Negro and finally to the repeal of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution."

HON. W. H. LEWIS.

*The writers of these letters are all prominent citizens of Boston.

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"Holding persons up to public hatred, contempt and ridicule is a crime because it tends to acts of revenge and breaches of the peace. This play—it is believed generally by the colored citizens of Boston—holds their race and therefore themselves up to hatred and contempt. Many white persons including myself share in this belief."

F. J. HAMMOND.

"It fans into a living flame the dying embers of bigotry, passion and hate."

ISADORE FOX.

"I examined the film with care attempting to be judicial on the question of whether it is obscene and I submit to you that no excision can prevent it from being really obscene and lustful. This is a matter in which I have had some experience, having sat for more than fifteen years as United States Commissioner under the Obscene Letter Statute."

RICHARD W. HALE.

RESOLUTIONS BY FEDERATION OF CHURCHES OF GREATER BOSTON

"That the directors of the Federation express in the strongest terms their disapproval of the photo-play 'The Birth of a Nation' considering it to be contrary to good public policy and in any broad sense of the term injurious to public morality, and they trust that some way will be found to prevent its further production."

NEW ENGLAND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

"Moved that it be the sense of this meeting of teachers of History and of English that it put on record its protest against this play and express its hope that wise and definite legislation be enacted under which the production of this and similar photo-plays may be prevented."

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BOSTON CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS

To the Mayor, the Chief Justice of the Municipal Court and the Police Commisisoner of the City of Boston:—

Whereas, the photo-drama entitled "The Birth of a Nation" now being presented in Tremont Theatre has aroused the entire Negro population of Boston, and created a most unfavorable impression upon many fair minded persons irrespective of race or color.

We, the undersigned, do hereby strongly protest against said photo-play and respectfully petition your Honorable Board to revoke the license for its production.

BOSTON CONG. MINISTERS.

Moderator:

REV. ANSEL E. JOHNSON.

Secretary:

REV. HARRY S. LOWD.

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